DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 439 EA 015 366

AUTHOR	Jones, Alan H.; LoPresti, Peter L.
TITLE	External Assessment: A California Case Study in Innovative Program Evaluation.
INSTITUTION	National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration.
SPONS AGENCY	CFK, Ltd., Denver, Colo.
PUB DATE	[82]
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	CCBC Notebook, the Competency Based Curriculum; p14-28
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Experimental Programs; Higher Education; Program Descriptions; *Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; Self Evaluation (Groups); *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS	California; *California Commission Teacher Prep and Licensing; *External Assessment

ABSTRACT

A history is presented of the External Assessment Pilot Project of California's Commission on Teacher Preparation and Licensing. Carried out from 1974 to 1979, the project assessed teacher education programs at California higher education institutions. After giving the background of the project, including the creation of the commission, the authors describe the assessment concept, which involved assessment by program constituents and comparison with original program proposals to identify discrepancies. They outline the project's eight-step assessment procedure, including assessor recruitment and training, an institutional self-assessment report, the assessors' report, comparison of the two reports, a panel review, and the panel's report to the commission. The authors then narrate the implementation of the External Assessment Pilot Project in each of the 5 school years, noting problems encountered with teacher educators, assessor training and attrition, politics, and time, and explaining the steps taken after the first 2 years to alleviate the problems. After 1979, the project name was dropped but the commission retained several of the practices. The final section of the report discusses the project's strengths (such as constituent involvement and ongoing institutional self-evaluation) and weaknesses (including emphasis on discrepancies and lack of statewide criteria). (RW)

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EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT:
A CALIFORNIA CASE STUDY
IN INNOVATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

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By

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From 1974 to 1979, the External Assessment Pilot Project of the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing experimented with external assessment. During the five year of its existence, the external assessment project generated considerable discussion and debate within the education community of California. The arguments of both advocates and critics on such issues as an appropriate framework and procedures for program evaluation and accreditation, involvement of community and non-professional evaluators, and the role of an agency such as the Commisssion should be of value to the higher education community across the United States.

An understanding of the controversy requires some background on the Commission itself, as well as a review of the conception, implementation, and evaluation of External Assessment over its five-year history. From such a review it is possible to isolate strengths and weaknesses of the system.

Background

The Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing of the State of California came into existence in 1970, with passage of the Teacher Preparation and Licensing Act, commonly referred to as the "Ryan Act," since its chief sponsor being Congressman and former California Assemblyman Leo Ryan. This legislation, reflecting political dissatisfaction with the governance of programs of teacher education in the state, created an independent agency to regulate teacher preparation and licensing, thereby removing those functions from the State Department of Education.

A Commission of fifteen voting members was created, such members to be appointed by the Governor from several specified categories including practicing teachers, school administrators, school board members, higher education faculty, and public non-educators. Although the original composition of the Commission called for a majority of educators, the law was later amended to increase the voting membership to seventeen and to require a majority of non-educator, public representatives. In addition to the voting members, five ex officio or non-voting representatives of the University of California system, the California State University and Colleges system, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of California, the California Postsecondary Education Commission, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction sat as part of the Commission with a voice in all deliberations.

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The Ryan Act provides that the Commission shall establish and maintain guidelines for approval of programs of teacher preparation and programs of academic preparation appropriate to the granting of basic teaching credentials and specialist credentials in several specific areas of professional service. During its first years of operation the Commission drafted guidelines, and invited institutions of higher education to submit program proposals responsible to them. Institutions which did not submit proposals and receive approval of such programs were not eligible to recommend candidates for professional credentials.

Over the last decade approximately seventy institutions of higher education in California received initial approval from the Commission to implement professional preparation programs based upon plans submitted in response to the guidelines. Each of the programs plans describes: 1) the manner in which institutional and community resources have been used to develop, implement and support the program; 2) the nature of the course offerings, specific objectives for each course and descriptions of the faculty; 3) the provisions for advising and evaluating cadidates; 4) the nature of field experiences required; and 5) the mechanisms for review and evaluation of the program and its graduates. On the average, program description documents submitted to the Commission were at least one hundred pages in length.

The Commission also established guidelines for programs in academic areas to satisfy the subject matter preparation required for basic teaching credentials, and for advanced programs leading to credentials in several specialist and services areas such as school administration, pupil personnel, reading, bilingual education, special education, and others. During the first two years of the External Assessment Pilot Project the model was limited to evaluation of basic teacher preparation programs, while in the third, fourth, and fifth years it was also applied to the specialist and services programs. No attempt was made during the five years to use External Assessment to evaluate the subject matter programs operating in academic fields outside teacher education.

The Assessment Concept

Since the Ryan Act required the Commission to conduct an ongoing evaluation of teacher education in California and since the initial approval of professional preparation programs constituted only a paper review, it was necessary for the Commission to develop some procedure for regular evaluation and accreditation of programs once implemented. In January 1974, the agency convened a planning conference, involving persons from the public school sector, higher education, and the general public, to discuss possible evaluation and accreditation procedures. It was from this conference that the idea of External Assessment emerged.

The framework for External Assessment is relatively simple. It is "discrepancy assessment" in which the implementation of a program is compared with the program proposal originally approved by the Commission. As stated in Commission documents on External Assessment, the assessment is "...a process for verifying the degree to which professional preparation programs are being implemented in accordance with the institution's Commisssion-approved program plans."

External Assessment is also an assessment by program constituents. The source of the term "External" is the belief that such an evaluation should be conducted on behalf of the Commission, but by persons external to both the Commission and its staff and the institution being evaluated. It is a client-centered approach, in which persons who depend on the quality of the program are expected to be the very people who can best comment on the effectiveness of program implementation. The constituent categories initially utilized in External Assessment were public school teachers, school administrators, school board members, teacher education candidates, and members of the general public, all drawn from the service area of the institution in question.

Clearly External Assessment was viewed by the Commission as an accountability model, through which the institution of higher education would demonstrate the degree to which its program was operating in a manner consistent with the initial approval granted by the Commission. Based upon such evaluation the Commission could then decide whether such approval would be renewed or terminated, thus fulfilling its legal mandate for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of teacher education in the state.

The External Assessment concept was created out of suspicion of the strong reliance on peer review in most traditional program evaluation and accreditation systems. Evaluation teams which had operated through the State Department of Education prior to the advent of the Commission had consisted primarily of teacher educators drawn from other campuses. There was concern that such a system was not sufficiently demanding nor did it properly reflect the needs of the public schools. Thus, the Commission chose in its External Assessment model to reflect the same wide range of constituencies which the Ryan Act had mandated for membership on the Commission.

The External Assessment model was viewed by the Commission as a viable and appropriate alternative to regional and national accrediation systems, primarily because the work of such bodies was seen as tangential to the needs of the Commission. The Commisssion, from its inception, required accreditation of institutions by the regional body prior to the submission of programs for Commission approval. However, regional accrediation does not focus heavily on the teacher education programs at institutions, and thus has never been viewed as a potential substitute for the Commission's own evaluation and accrediation of such programs. Regional approval is considered only as an indication of general institutional stability and strength which initially would qualify a college or university to offer program proposals to the Commission.

Accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, naturally, would appear far more relevant to the work of the Commission. However, at no point during the last decade has more than a handful of the seventy or so colleges or universities doing business with the Commission chosen to seek NCATE approval. It was the determination of the Commission that it would not be appropriate to call upon California schools to join the NCATE system. The Commission had argued consistently that it had the basic responsibility to accredit programs, and should not hand such responsibility over to another organization such as NCATE. In 1974, when External Assessment was developed for the purpose of involving a wide range of institutional constituencies, NCATE teams consisted primarily of teacher education peers from other campuses. NCATE has now broadened it evaluation teams to involve many of the

constituencies first pioneered by External Assessment, and during the five years of the California assessment system some cooperative arrangements were attempted with NCATE on a few campuses.

The innovative aspects of External Assessment rest primarily with a discrepancy model and the involvement of constituent evaluators. Because each program of professional preparation had received initial approval from the Commission based on the merits of specific program plan, External Assessment was structured to evaluate the degree to which the plan had been effectively implemented. Since no two institutional plans would be the same, no single evaluation model was viewed as appropriate to all campuses. Although all programs were developed in response to the Commission's general guidelines, differences in program intent at each institution would require variations in evalution appropriate to the specific nature of the program in question. Thus, nothing but a discrepancy model would do the job.

This theoretical model for External Assessment has been the source of considerable debate during its five years of implementation and since its abandonment by the agency. Advocates of the model point to the need for evaluation attuned to the specifics of each program, and argue that all evaluationsystems are, inessence, of a discrepancy nature. Critics of External Assessment, on the other hand, point to the lack of universal standards across programs, and argue that the heavy reliance on identification of discrepancies creates a negative orientation to the assessment process which ignores the positive features of programs. Critics even suggested that External Assessment is more of a governmental inspection than a genuine evaluation.

Similar arguments surfaced relative to the participation of the wide range of constituencies as evaluators, with particular concern about the ability of public non-educators to function in such a role. Advocates of External Assessment pointed to the need for wide involvement and the potential for development of broad support for professional education; however, the question of appropriate qualifications for evaluators remained a point of contention.

The Assessment Procedure

Following the design conference in January of 1974, another conference was held to refine the assessment plans, and the staff of the Commission was directed to develop implementation procedures so that the first programs could be reviewed during the 1974-75 academic year. The basic steps involved in the system and utilized during each of the five years of implementation, included eight primary activities.

First, potential assessors representative of constituents of the programs to be evaluated needed be identified and recruited. Initially this was done through direct contacts with organizations and constituency leaders both in the educational and community sectors along with a general call for nominees and volunteers. As the system became more sophisticated in the third through fifth years, a file of interested and experienced persons was developed, from which potential assessors were drawn.

Second, assessors needed to be trained by the staff of the Commission. This was done based upon a training program developed for External Assessment in general, the Commisssion guidelines, and the specifics of the institutional program plan being evaluated. Since the assessment procedure involved interviews as a major data-gathering tool, the training focused on appropriate interview procedures and techniques.

Third, the institution prepared a self-assessment report, in which it is to indicate the degree to which it has been able to implement its program in conformity with the approved program plan and provide a rationale for discrepancies which might exist between plan and implementation.

Fourth, the actual assessment was conducted by the trained assessors. The primary assessment activity was interviews involving program faculty, administrators, students of the program, cooperating public school personnel, and others involved with and familiar with the program. While specifics of the assessment differed over the five years, assessors usually worked in small teams focusing on particular program areas, such as community and institutional support, professional courses, advising and evaluation, and field experiences.

Fifth, at the end of the assessment period the assessors meet in their teams to discuss individual findings and prepare a consensus report identifying discrepancies between the program as it was functioning and the approved program plan. Included were any other observations, suggestions, or recommendations which appear appropriate. At the conclusion of these meetings the consensus reports were shared with all assessors and the institution.

Sixth, Consensus reports and the institution's self-report were reviewed at a later meeting and points of uncertainty or disagreement were clarified. At the end of this second session any of the assessor teams and the instiution staff could prepare additional written statements to append to their previous reports.

Seventh, all reports produced in the assessment process - the instiutional self-reports, assessor consensus reports, and clarification statements - were submitted to members of a statewide or regional panel for review. The panel consisted of representatives of the various constituencies involved in the assessment process and selected on a statewide basis. The panel was charged with a review of the reports and preparation of a composite assessment report specifying discrepancies recommending program approval or disapproval to the Commission. The panel undertook this work at the end of the academic year after all program assessment visits have been made. Multiple panels were used from the second through the fifth year, since there were too many reports for one panel.

Eighth, the Commission received reports from the panel(s). These reports were first considered by the Programs Committee of the Commission for a recommendation to the full Commission. Final action was taken on approval or disapproval of each program. If controversy developed over a program assessment, opportunity was provided for discussion with representatives of the institution and the assessment team at the Commission meeting. In situations in which a recommendation for disapproval of a program resulted from the assessment, an opportunity for the institution to appeal such a decision was provided.

Although some substantive changes were made in the assessment process during the five years of implementation, these eight basic steps remained in place. The effectiveness of such steps, as well as the thrust of the deliberations about strengths and weaknesses of the system, varied during each of the years of operation.

Initial Implementation

The External Assessment Pilot Project was initiated in the fall of 1974. Pilot Phase I involved the assessment of basic teacher preparation programs at four institutions of higher education, each of which had volunteered to participate. Administrators at those campuses worked closely with the staff of the Commission in refining the initial assessment procedures, training the assessors, and coordinating the actual assessments early in 1975.

The Pilot Phase I Regional Panel recommended continued approval of the programs at the four institutions, and the Commission granted "Standard Approval" to each. Standard approval was granted for an unspecified period of time. However, each institution with standard approval prepared annual reports to the Commission on the continuing conduct of the program and responded to any questions which the Commission raised. Further assessments of programs with standard approval were keyed only to problems raised by the annual reports or to concerns raised by constituents in the service area.

Certain "conditions" could be placed on instutions having approval with the understanding that such questions would be addressed in the first annual report. The topics of such conditions evolved from any weaknesses or discrepancies identified during the assessment.

While all four institutions participating in Pilot Phase I received standard approval, several strengths and weaknesses of the assessment system itself were also identified during that first year. The participation of volunteer assessors was enthusiastic, but participation varied considerably among the constituent categories. Public school teachers and administrators participated heavily, while problems were encountered in obtaining similar participation from the other constituencies. Teacher education students, school board members, parent-teacher associations, and minority community representatives volunteered and participated in much smaller numbers than did the school teachers and administrators.

The reports produced by the assessor teams and the regional panel in Pilot Phase I received very mixed reactions. At two institutions the reports were welcomed in the form received, and the discrepancies identified were agreed with readily by the faculty. However, at the other two institutions the accuracy and thoroughness of the assessment reports were challenged by administration, and faculty consultation between the staff of the Commission and these institutions was required before a final assessmen report could be developed cooperatively.

Such difficulties provided incentive to critics of the External Assessment system, and it was argued by many observers that the constituent

assessors were not competent to prepare the kind of evaluation report required for accreditation decisions, and that no training procedures would be adequate to properly prepare non-educators for such service. The nature of the discrepancy-based evaluation with its emphasis on negative findings also drew strong criticism at the end of Phase I.

Several procedural difficulties were encountered in addition to these philosophical conerns. Not enough time had been scheduled for several of the activities required in Phase I, and participants had not received materials with adequate lead time to prepare for their role. The selection of volunteer assessors was criticized by some observers. Major reliance had been placed on the recommendations of teacher organizations and other constituencies, some of which were felt to have an anti-teacher education bias. The training program for assessors was far from thorough enough to meet the rigors of the interview and evaluation process, as indicated by the evaluation sheets completed by the assessors themselves.

In addition, relationships between the assessors, the Commission staff, and the institutional faculty and administrators had not been clearly defined, and some difficulties arose regarding what was expected to be a cooperative process. The role of the institutional self-report in the process had been altered at the last minute by the staff of the Commission, without consultation with the four institutions. The regional panel also expressed uncertainty about the exact nature of its role, and any appeal process for the institutions, although not needed this first year, had been left undefined.

Most of these difficulties were clearly reflected in an evaluation of the process as conducted by the staff of the Commission. Evaluation made liberal use of the comments and suggestions from the assessors, the institutions, and the constituency groups that participated during the first year. These problems, however, raised further concern throughout the teacher education community in California, and External Assessment began to be viewed with considerable alarm by nearly all of the seventy colleges and universities involved with professional education in the state.

Concerns were aired at a meeting of the California Council on the Education of Teacher (a federation of teacher education institutions and public school organizations) in May of 1975, just as Pilot Phase I was completed. In addition to a thorough discussion of the External Assessment system, including several suggestions for overhaul of the discrepancy model, appeal was made to include representatives of the teacher education profession among assessors. It was clear that to have moved from a peer review system to a new model that did not include peers at all had been a major affront to the teacher education community.

A Redesign Process

Based upon the experiences of Pilot Phase I, and in response to the criticisms voiced within the teacher education community, a redesign conference was held in July of 1975 to prepare for the second year of External Assessment. This conference involved faculty from the four institutions and the several constituencies which participated in Pilot Phase I. The conference addressed suggestions which would improve the process for the next year. Despite some reservations, the four institutions endorsed a continuation of the constituency assessment concept.

The implementation plan for Pilot Phase II was developed in concept at the redesign conference and expanded in detail by the staff of the Commission. The plan included:

1. a nine-month time frame to assure adequate scheduling of all activities,

2. a greater reliance on local recruiting of constituent assessors to assure broader participation and less influence by statewide constituency leaders,

3. a three-evening training program for assessors at each institution to assure more effective preparation for the assessment tasks, and

4. a stronger role for the regional panel(s) in developing a final report and recommendation to the Commission in the hope that this would improve the quality of the assessment product.

Pilot Phase II was to involve nine institutions of higher education, several of which had multiple basic teacher education programs. Thus, while a total of fourteen programs were scheduled for assessment in the 1975-76 academic year, the system was still limited only to basic programs.

The Second Year of Implementation

While some of the nine institutions involved in Pilot Phase II were volunteers, several had to be drafted by the Commission. Included in this second year were three large campuses of the California campuses, and four smaller private institutions. Pilot Phase I has included institutions from each of these categories.

Pilot Phase II began with two meetings between staff of the Commission and institutional administrators to discuss specifics of the year's implementation plan. The process of recruiting assessors took place during the fall, and the institutions proceeded to prepare their self-reports. Assessor training began in December of 1975, and three sessions at each institution were scheduled. A month-long assessment period was scheduled for each campus on a staggered basis during the first three months of 1976. The two regional panels involved in Phase II met in May, with final reports going to the Commission at its June meeting.

In response to previous criticism, the Pilot Phase II plan called for involvement of teacher educators as one of the major assessor constituencies in half of the assessments. This was done on the assumption that if such participation proved valuable on a trial basis, then peer involvement would become standard in future years.

Based upon the reports and recommendations generated in Pilot Phase II, the Commission granted standard approval with conditions to twelve of the fourteen programs under assessment. The assessment of the other two programs, both located at one of the California State University and Colleges campuses, identified longer and more severe lists of discrepancies than in any other review. The regional panel recommended "Probationary Approval" for the programs. This form of approval gives the institution a two-year period to correct discrepancies or approval is terminated completely by the Commission.

The institution in question challenged the validity and objectivity of the assessment process, including charges that certain of the assessors were known to be biased against the campus and had turned the assessment into a political vendetta between the university and local teacher organizations. It is interesting to note that this same campus underwent an NCATE evaluation that same year, which resulted in receipt of a five-year approval by the national body. Based upon such uncertainties, and the continuing experimental nature of External Assessment, the Commission chose to continue its previous initial approval of the two programs and to schedule a new External Assessment of the campus in the immediate future.

As with Pilot Phase I, several strengths and weaknesses of the assessment process were documented during the second year. A thorough evaluation was conducted by the staff of the Commission, again involving input from all participants - assessors, regional panel members, and institutional administrators and faculty. The products of the second year of assessment, both the assessor team reports and the regional panel reports, were felt to be more thorough and professionally prepared than in Pilot Phase I. The training process was more extensive, since it involved three separate evenings, and nearly all assessors reported that they felt well prepared for the assessment period. The definition of the varying roles of the assessors, staff of the Commission, and institutional personnel were clearer than the first year, and a growing understanding of the process was evidenced.

Difficulties during the second year of External Assessment were critical in two areas. Participation of the volunteer assessors fell off significantly between the point of recruitment and completion of the assessment assignment. Overall, only forty-three per cent of those recruited as assessors participated to the point of conducting interviews and attending consensus meetings. This meant that once again many of the desired constituencies were drastically underrepresented, and often not represented at all. Only persons from the public school teacher constituent category were well represented in assessment teams at all nine campuses. Further, in the case of three institutional assessments the rate of assessor attrition was so great that not enough persons remained involved to prepare a genuine "consensus" report on all program areas assessed. In a few cases reports were prepared by a single assessor.

Another major difficulty during Pilot Phase II concerned instances of interference between institutions being assessed, the assessor groups involved in the assessment, and the Commission staff coordinating the assessment. One of the nine institutions openly expressed its hostility to the assessment process beginning at the first training session and continuously challenged activities of the assessors and staff of the Commission throughout the assessment year. Several other Pilot Phase II institutions, while cooperating with the assessment process, expressed reservations about the procedure and indicated a need for considerable revision in the system.

Primary criticism from the participating institutions, and from others in California teacher education, focused on the need to replace the discrepancy evaluation with a quality-referenced technique, the need to develop an assessor recruiting procedure which would assure unbiased participants, the need to prevent future attrition of assessors once recruited, and the need to shorten and improve the documents required within the assessment system. The concerns were so deeply felt at this point that several teacher education groups in the

state sought to have the Commission suspend External Assessment rather than proceed with a Pilot Phase III.

Further Refinements

While the controversy surrounding External Assessment was heightened by the difficulties experienced in Pilot Phase II, the evaluation report on that year contained several major refinements in the implementation plan for a third year and gave some measure of encouragement to the Commission. The evaluation of Phase II indicated that new procedures were required for selection of objective assessors to: 1) assure ongoing participation by those assessors, 2) improve the previously haphazard interview procedures, to overcome the rigidity and negativeness of the discrepancy approach, and 3) to reduce the bulkiness of the process which grew from the overly-long documents describing programs.

In response to these concerns the staff of the Commission recommended basic revisions for Pilot Phase III. Among these was the creation of a pool of interested and committed potential assessors from which a representative assessor team could be drawn by lot for each future assessment. The criteria for inclusion in the pool would be membership in one of the desired constituencies and a prior commitment to complete the assignment if selected to serve as an assessor.

Other recommendations for improvement in the system included the streamlining of the assessment schedule to reduce the time commitment for each assessor, the combination of intensive training and scheduling of interviews into a time block on each campus during which staff of the Commssion would be on site to assure that all interviews were actually completed, and the special targeting of important issues for assessment to allow a reduction, in the bulk of the institutional reports.

While these improvements were suggested to reduce the complexity of the system, it was also recommended that Pilot Phase III expand in scope to include twelve institutions of higher education, with assessments to be conducted on both basic teacher education programs and specialist and services programs at those institutions. This would involve the assessment of some fifty programs in all, since it was argued that if the External Assessment model could not be shown to be viable at this expanded level, it would have little prospect for long-range use by the Commission. The agency works with approximately seventy institutions. In these institutions more than five hundred professional preparation programs received initial approval, and thus, an accreditation system must have the capacity to move through all of these programs within a period of five to ten years.

The proposed revisions were submitted to an implementation conference, including participants from Phase II and staff from institutions scheduled for Phase III. Based on the recommendations from that session the Commission determined to proceed with Phase III in the manner outlined by its staff. An additional directive was given that all participants in the assessment process should seek to provide an opportunity for both discrepancy and qualitative evaluation by the assessors.

Third Year of Implementation

Pilot Phase III of External Assessment was conducted during the 1976-77 academic year with involvement of twelve institutions. These institutions represented each major section of California higher education, and ranged in size from the largest to the smallest in the state. Approximately fifty separate programs of professional preparation were assessed, resulting in the granting of standard approval by the Commission to all. Programs included both basic credential programs and specialist and services programs at each of the twelve institutions.

The improvements proposed for the third year of External Assessment were implemented in a manner so immediately effective that proponents of the system began to argue that it was clearly a model worthy of long-range adoption by the Commission. The assessor pool was implemented in the fall of 1976, and several thousand potential assessors completed application forms and were entered into the file for possible use in the system. Over two thousand resumes deemed acceptable for such service were received, and three hundred eighty-four assessors were selected for participation during Pilot Phase III. At the end of the year only seven of these individuals had failed to complete all assignments, a remarkable improvement over the previous year.

Improvements were also made in training and assessment procedures, since the time period was shortened and intensified to assure higher levels of assessor participation. The target areas for assessments were specified by the Commission, and the reports prepared by both institutions and assessor teams were more brief and pointed in arguments and observations.

In Pilot Phase III, all assessments included representatives from the teacher education community, since the use of some peer assessors the previous year had been deemed a success by the Commission. Phase III also provided a first opportunity for "quality" as well as "discrepancy" assessment findings, allowing institutions to speak to aspects of their programs which they perceived to be particularly strong, and to receive reaction on such items from the assessor teams. Although such issues were not to comprise a part of the final determinations or program approval or disapproval, it did provide an opportunity for some initial dialogue on program quality.

Fourth Year of Implementation

With the selection and retention of assessors now on a far more stable footing and some mixture of quality considerations with the original discrepancy assessment approach, the Commission and its staff were able to proceed to a fourth year of External Assessment with far less controversy than previously. No major redesign was deemed necessary, and the fourth year sought in general to replicate the third, with another dozen institutions and fifty separate programs of professional preparation involved.

Some problems with the system remained, however, and many people in the California teacher education community refused to embrace the notion of External Assessment as a permanent part of their lives. The interview process which was so basic to the model continued to cause trouble that year. Questions were rewritten by Commission staff each year, in an attempt to draw important notions

from the Commission's program guidelines while meeting the specific program differences on each campus. And each year the assessors and institutional staff experienced problems in effective use of the questions. Arguments flourished over whether the problem was in the development of appropriate questions, or in the continued attempts to turn non-educators into effective educational interviewers. Thus, while some twelve institutions cooperated fully in the operation of External Assessment in each of the third and fourth years, there continued to be a strong undercurrent of discontent with the system. Some early critics of the system had come to acknowledge that the use of program constituents was working fairly well, and that in many cases such individuals had become strong supporters of the campuses which they visited as assessors. Others continued to doubt the professionalism of having such a wide range of individuals perform an evaluative role.

Perhaps the greater continuing concern revolved around the unhappiness with the discrepancy model for the assessments. As four years of experimentation with the system passed, the primary concern focused on the lack of any statewide or national standards within the discrepancy system. If each program was being judged on its own merits, as compared with its approved program plan, how could the Commission assure that judgements of ongoing approval or disapproval were consistent across the state? This was a question that the Commission found difficult, and it was being asked more and more frequently during the ongoing implementation of the system.

The Final Year of External Assessment

The concerns about constituent assessors and discrepancy assessment plaqued the Commission during the latter part of the fourth year of External Assessment. This occurred primarily because some other arms of state government entered the controversy at that time. A few members of the Legislature with special interests in the field of education began raising questions about teacher quality in the state, and the procedures used by the Commission to evaluate teacher education gained some additional attention as a result. As was common practice in the California Legislature, this attention resulted in a rider on the annual appropriations bill requesting the agency to review and explain its budgetary procedures in the area of program review and evaluation.

The result of such investigation by the Office of the Legislative Analyst, an independent fiscal arm of the Legislature, was a recommendation during the fifth year of External Assessment that the Commission's budget be reduced because there was no clear indication that the evaluations resulting from External Assessment were cost efficient. Major concern was raised about the expense involved in having so many constituents involved in assessments, as well as in the lack of ability to make judgements across the assessment findings since the discrepancy model was not conducive to institutional comparisons.

Although the Commission felt strongly that the External Assessment model was serving its intersts and needs well, it was not in a strong position to argue with the Legislative budget process. In anticipation of such criticisms the scope of External Assessment was reduced during

the fifth year of implementation to include fewer institutions at a reduced budgetary level. Also, the name External Assessment was dropped from the Commission's operations altogether after that fifth year.

In reality, many aspects of the system have been retained. The Commission continues to field external evaluation teams, drawn from the assessor pool established in the third year of the system. The pool, however, has been expanded gradually to include a greater number of public school educators and teacher education peers. The service of such persons has proven to be the most dependable both with respect to participation in assessments and demonstrated ability to prepare viable assessment reports. An effort continues to be made to involve other constituencies, but the size of the teams has been reduced greatly, thus creating further reliance on experienced educators as assessors.

The major change in the system, along with dropping the External Assessment, has been the utilization of statewide standards for all programs, drawn from the original Commission guidelines for program approval. Rather than assessing programs against the institutional program plan, the assessment is now conducted against the state standards, in a manner much more consistent with traditional accreditation procedures.

Even with these changes, the Commission continues to have difficulty with maintenance of a system adequate to meet the demands for timely evaluation of the more than five hundred programs of professional preparation across the state. Dating back to the initial year of External Assessment in 1974-75, the agency has now reviewed only about half of the programs operating with its approval, and projected into the future this would suggest that not all programs will be reviewed until approximately 1990 unless the Commission is able to get legislative approval for an increased budget in this area - a highly unlikely eventuality in this era of budget-cutting.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Although External Assessment is now part of history, it remains appropriate to review some of its apparent strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, the concept of constituency involvement in program evaluation gained a strong following both among the many constituencies which participated and among the institutions reviewed. With few dissenters, it has been the experience of California teacher education that working with constituents in this way provides effective community feedback and improved communication with the institution's service area. While there has been gradual return to reliance on peers in the reduced assessment teams the Commission has used the past few years, the involvement of broad constituencies in the assessor pool has been maintained and is likely to be a permanent fixture in California teacher education evaluation. In addition, most national higher education accreditation systems, including NCATE, have also moved to braoden the representativeness of their evaluation teams. Since there was considerable interaction between the Commission's External Assessment system and NCATE during the 1974-79 period, it is not inappropriate to suggest that the California experiment has had some impact on NCATE's movement toward such broader involvement of interested constituencies.

External Assessment also encouraged ongoing institutional self-evaluation, with particular attention to the accountability implied by the initial approval of a program proposal by the Commission. The program plan was a type of contract between the institution and the Commission, and the assessment process provided an opportunity for evaluation of that contract, for updating it was necessary, and for collection of data to assist the Commission in evaluating its guidelines on which original program approval was based.

Despite such successes, the External Assessment system was never able to respond effectively to the arguments against the discrepancy orientation of the model. Detractors indicated that the focus on identifying discrepancies gave the entire system a flavor of government inspection, seeking to isolate things that were "wrong" rather than looking at the actual quality, or lack of quality, of the program in question.

The reliance on discrepancy between the original institutional program plan and its implementation, establishing a system of alternative standards for each program in the state, was unquestionably the feature which ultimately caused the Commission to back away from the External Assessment model. The lack of statewide consistency and comparability was a wekaness which the Commission could not defnd, particularly in the face of legislative criticism.

External Assessment also fell victim to bureaucratic tendencies which afflict all governmental agencies. The system grew rapidly over the first three years, seeking to establish itself as a viable means of evaluating the multitude of approved programs across the state. At the same time, it was difficult if not impossible to hold in check the volume of paperwork required by the system, and the costs to both the Commission and the institutions involved. In reality, it was questions of cost-effectiveness which gave the Office of the Legislative Analyst concrete reasons for calling External Assessment into question.

In retrospect such fiscal considerations were probably unfair, or at least overplayed. External Assessment relied in large part on volunteer assessors, whose expenses were quite modest since in most cases they were drawn from areas near the campuses which they helped evaluate. The costs to the institutions being assessed were similar to any other accrediation system, since a self-report was to be prepared and faculty and staff were involved in a series of interviews and meetings during the evaluation period. Several comparisons conducted by staff of the Commission showed the costs of External Assessment, on the average, to be less than half the cost to institutions of accrediation visits by WASC or NCATE.

In the final analysis it appears that External Assessment made two major contributions to the ongoing refinement of program evaluation systems. First, it underscored the need for greater cooperation and communication between institutions of higher education involved in teacher preparation and the communities which such colleges and universities serve, and it provided a model for such cooperation and communication in the context of program review and evaluation. Second, it raised a series of questions and concerns within the California teacher education community over evaluation procedures and philosophies which has led to a higher level of self-analysis and dialogue: thus it has served to increase understanding of the difficulties of effective program evalution. These are contributions that have relevance far wider than the teacher education

community of California, since the same problems and prospects for program evaluation have implications nationally and internationally.

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The CCBC Notebook is a quarterly, non-profit publication that serves the Competency Based Interest Group of NCPEA. Its editors are Lloyd McCleary and Tom Brown with offices at 339 Milton Bennion Hall, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. The Editorial Board members are:

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